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IS THE FAMILY DECLINING? *

THE title of this paper was suggested by the chapter on the "Decline of the Family" in Charles Pearson's interesting book on "National Life and Character." The writer there only gives form to a widely-spread impression that we are in the middle of a movement the issue of which can only be the disintegration of the family group and the transference of the functions that have hitherto been performed by it to the state. The object of my paper is to examine more closely than Mr. Pearson appears to have done the grounds of this impression, and to inquire whether it is really supported by the facts.

I.

In the first place, as to the facts themselves and the causes to which they are referred, it must be admitted at once that there are many facts which lend countenance to the view that the family is on the decline. There are facts to prove that there are fewer marriages in proportion to population; that the families which result from these marriages are smaller; that they are less coherent; and that they are less lasting. Thus, Mr. Ogle † has shown in reference to the first of these points that, taking all classes together, the marriage rate in England fell between 1851 and 1881 from 17.2 to 15.2 per cent., and that between 1873 and 1888 the ages of men and women who marry rose respectively from 25.6 and 24.2 to 26.3 and 24.7, and this notwithstanding the fact that the average price of wheat went down from 38s. 6d. in 1851 to 31s. 10d. in 1888, while the price of British exports per head of population rose during the same period from £2 14s. 4d. to £6 4s. 11d. The statistics of divorce which go to establish the last point, viz., the diminished stability of marriages, are still more striking. The rise in the number of divorces during the quarter of a century between 1860 and

* A lecture given for the London Ethical Society.

† *Journal of Statistical Society*, June, 1890, p. 254.

1885 seems to have been universal. To quote the case of England and America alone, while in 1871 England and Wales show 1 divorce to 1020.4 marriages, in 1879 this had become 1 in 480.83. Between the years 1867 and 1886 divorces in the United States is said to have increased 157 per cent., while the population showed an increase during the same period of 60 per cent.* Some of the individual States showed a very high average. An American writer† quotes statistics from Massachusetts showing that divorces rose from 1 in 51 marriages in 1860 to 1 in 21.4 in 1878.

When we pass from the enumeration of the bare facts to inquire into their causes, the general impression that we are committed to vital changes in the institution of the family, and that there is no saying where they will stop, seems to receive further confirmation. Of these causes the first and most general is, of course, the whole modern movement of liberation. The century and a half which has witnessed the emancipation of nations from sovereigns, and of slaves from masters, has witnessed also the emancipation of the wife and mother from the state of dependence upon man, in which law and custom had so long detained her, and of children from the selfishness and caprices of parents.‡

Another of the more general causes is the disappearance in Protestant countries of the ecclesiastical and even the religious view of marriage. Here, also, the statistics are striking. To take only two examples. In Switzerland, in the year 1879, there were eight times the number of divorces in the Protestant as compared with the Roman Catholic cantons, although

* See Lecky's "Democracy and Liberty," vol. ii., p. 173.

† Thwing, "The Family," p. 153.

‡ Höffding, "Ethik," p. 249, quotes an interesting indication of the growth of the idea of the rights of children in the middle of the present century. Speaking of the Danish Constitution of 1849, he mentions that the first draft of the clause that related to education claimed it as a right of parents, who were unable to send their children to school, to have them educated at the public expense. The clause was afterwards altered to a claim for children whose parents were not in a position to care for their education, that they should receive free instruction in the public schools, on the express ground that it was not the parents but the children whose rights were in question.

the population is only a half larger. In Alsace-Lorraine, since that province came under the Protestant system, in 1871, a large increase of divorce has taken place. Between 1874 and 1878 the number of divorces increased fourfold.*

Of more special causes affecting the constitution of the family we have the growth of large cities both here and in America. This has completely altered the environment in which this organism lives and moves. Men have thus become less dependent upon women for the supply of their home needs. The immense development of club life both in the working and middle classes is probably inimical to the old idea of the home. And along with this goes the sadder consequence of the extent of prostitution. On the other hand, women have resources and interests which the simple life of the country or small town denies them. Another consequence is the bringing together of people of the most diverse antecedents, traditions, and even nationalities, and the rapid development of attachments formed on no deep acquaintance with the underlying traits of character or prevailing motives of action.

Among the more special causes ought to be mentioned the increased facilities for the higher education of women. A recent analysis of some fifteen hundred cases of women who have passed through a university training in England has shown that the number of marriages is distinctly lower than among an equal number chosen at random from the same class.† The writer draws the conclusion that the British mother ought to realize that in sending her daughter to these institutions the chances are much higher in favor of her becoming a teacher than a wife. The reason is partly that new intellectual interests are opened up and college friendships formed which make such women comparatively independent of the companionship of men. But, of course, facts like these can only be understood in connection with a second group of special causes, viz., the economic.

* Oettingen, "Moral-Statistik," third edition, p. 168.

† *Nineteenth Century*, June, 1895. Of 1486 ex-students of the chief women's colleges in England whose after careers had been followed only 208 (about 14 per cent.) had married; 680 had become teachers.

That new economic opportunities for women of the middle class should act in a double way upon the institution of the family is only natural. On the one hand, they are a formidable rival in the mind of women themselves to the domestic and merely social life which marriage offers. On the other hand, they bring into the industrial market a new class of competitors with whom the standard of wages is no longer what is sufficient to support a family, but what is sufficient for an individual. So far as this is so, the tendency is to lower the general standard of wages and to make it more difficult for men to earn sufficient to justify them in marrying.

The effect of modern economic conditions upon the working-class family is of course different. It is noticeable rather in what I have called diminished coherence than in the diminished number of family groups. The workman is more dependent on a wife for the comforts of a home and for an addition to his wages. It is therefore not surprising to find that, contrary to what might be at first expected, marriages on the whole are more numerous in those counties in England in which women are earning independent wages.* On the other hand, the home, when once formed, is apt to be more comfortless on account of the temptation the wife is under to go out to work or to take work home with her.†

II.

We have seen that there is a general impression that the family is declining, and we have attempted a short analysis of the facts on which this impression rests. Do they really justify the conclusions drawn from them? Do they bear the interpretation that is put upon them? Others have been before us in this field, and not only accepted the view in question but endeavored to represent it as an inevitable and highly desirable result of social evolution. To give a point to my criticism, I take this extreme view at the outset. It has many sup-

* *Journal of Statistical Society*, June, 1890.

† That this is not always the result of dire necessity seems proved by cases in which the wife's wages are supplementary to total weekly earnings of from fifty to sixty shillings. (Jevons, "Methods of Social Reform," p. 169.)

porters among socialistic writers, and has been stated with great vividness by Mr. Edward Carpenter in his recent book upon "Love's Coming of Age."

It is maintained by these writers that the monogamic family is a relic of a decaying form of civilization. All the ideas on which it rests,—the subordination and dependence of women, the ownership of children, the belief in the sacredness of marriage as a divine institution, above all, respect for individual ownership of property and the rights of inheritance as permanent elements in our social organization—have been undermined. The foundations are sapped and the superstructure is ready to topple in. The sooner it does so the better, seeing that it merely serves to propagate those habits of selfish isolation from common interests which it is the aim of the new *régime* effectually to stamp out, and thus forms one of the most serious obstacles to genuine social reform.

The view that is here taken of the present state and future prospects of the family is supported by an account of its historic origin, which stamps it from the outset as a morbid outgrowth upon the natural relations of male and female. "Far back in history," writes Mr. Carpenter,* "at a time when in the early societies the thought of inequality had hardly arisen, it would appear that the female, in her own way—as sole authenticator of birth and parentage, as guardian of the household, as inventress of agriculture and the peaceful arts, as priestess and prophetess or sharer in the councils of the tribe,—was as powerful as man in his, and sometimes even more so. But from thence down to to-day what centuries of repression, of slavehood, of dumbness, of obscurity have been her lot!" The monogamic family owes its origin to the greed for private possession. What, therefore, more natural than that on the overthrow of the ideas on which this long interregnum of selfishness and oppression has rested the family should revert to the earlier type, which recognized the complete freedom and independence of wife and mother.

The view thus summarily stated opens, of course, questions

* "Love's Coming of Age."

which it is impossible to discuss here, as, for instance, the justification of private property and the right of inheritance. Keeping clear of these larger issues, I shall confine myself to stating one or two objections to it from the point of view of the nature and origin of the family itself. They seem to me sufficient to throw discredit on its claims to be a true interpretation of the facts with which we started.

I. To begin at Genesis, the picture of the prehistoric woman and of the origin of the monogamic family here presented bears about as close a relation to fact as the corresponding picture of the prehistoric man and the origin of civil society in writers of last century.

The casual reader of the above passage quoted from Mr. Carpenter would naturally suppose that the so-called "matriarchate" was the common parent of all other forms of marriage, that it was widely spread over the globe, and that the position of the woman at this stage of development was far superior to that which obtained after the institution of monogamy. He will be surprised to learn that there is not a shadow of justification for any of these statements. All the best authorities prove that monogamy exists to a large extent among the lower animals,* that polygamy has never been general, but is only an exceptional form of marriage,† that there is no trace in the great majority of the tribes that practise it of any superiority in the position of women over that which they occupy in monogamous societies,‡ and that in the one instance we have of a comparatively complete and logical polyandric system,—viz., the Nairs of Malabar, the woman is as much the property of man as she is in the closest monogamic system,—the only difference being that the man is her brother instead of her husband.§

* Letourneau, "Evolution of Marriage," Chapter II, Section 3. I quote Letourneau in preference to others because Mr. Carpenter acknowledges him as an authority.

† Ibid., p. 77.

‡ Ibid., p. 105.

§ Ibid., p. 312. The actual condition of the polyandrous wife, as we have it from Strabo (see Letourneau, p. 39), throws a curious light on the idyllic picture Mr. Carpenter draws of the primitive woman.

2. The theory that the monogamic family, of which the institution as we know it among western nations is the lineal descendant, is founded on male egoism is equally devoid of support. Mr. Hearn, in his classical book on the Aryan Household, has shown beyond controversy that the relation of single wife to single husband performed from the beginning a social function. It is true that the wife was in theory owned by her husband, but he owned her as he owned the rest of his property,—in trust for the corporation of the family. In the Aryan household, at least, the free, independent man of the monogamic stage is as mythical a personage as the free, independent woman of the polyandric. The husband is responsible to the family, and might even be said to belong to the family in the same sense as the wife is responsible to and belongs to him. He is the representative of a larger body, which includes the great company of the dead and the unborn as well as the little group of the living. The object of securing the legitimacy of the children was not primarily to establish them in the rights of private possession, but to guarantee the due performance of the religious rites on which the whole prosperity of the family, and through it of the community, was thought to depend.

3. The same is true of the monogamic family as it exists to-day. Whatever we are to say of its origin, its *raison d'être* is not to be looked for merely or chiefly in its service to the institution of private property. To maintain, as some writers do, that its chief justification is the necessity under an individualistic system to secure the rights of the children to the family inheritance, is to mistake an accident for the essence of the institution. Even though inheritance were abolished to-morrow, society would have the strongest reasons for upholding the monogamic family.

In the first place, there are the ethical functions which the family performs in the nurture and education of the children. Nothing is more striking, in the utterances of the writers now referred to, than the airy assumption that the functions of the parent in this field can be taken over not only without loss, but with appreciable gain by the public nurse and school-

board teacher. It is, of course, true that much may be done in the intelligently managed crèche and kindergarten to supply the place of the family in training the affections and developing the germs of the social will; but there is not a particle of evidence in the whole history of human experience to show that these can be more than useful supplements to home discipline, when this is either absent or defective. I am, of course, perfectly aware of all that has been said as to the antisocial influence of the modern family. Much of it is only too true. The family has often fallen very far short of its ideal as the nursery of social virtue. It has too often been a stagnant pool of self-centred interests into which the fresh currents of social feeling have found no entrance. But, so far as it has been this, it has been itself the loser. I should be surprised to learn that families of this type possess a greater internal coherence or greater stability than those through which the fresh stream of the larger life continually breaks. In any case, that such an abuse is possible is no more an argument against the institution itself than the abuse of the franchise to promote a class interest at the expense of the community or freedom of speech; to preach anarchy is an argument for the abolition of these rights. It proves that in the use of the family, as in the uses of the franchise and the right of free speech, the community has still much to learn. It does not prove that it could ever learn it without the aid of these institutions themselves.

The sociological basis of the family has received even less notice from socialists of this type than the ethical. We hear a great deal about social evolution from these writers; most of them, probably, accept the view that natural selection operates in human societies as among animal organisms; and yet it is not too much to say that their whole teaching on the subject of the family is in flagrant contradiction to this admission. One looks in vain in their writings for any intelligent appreciation of the fact that not only has civil marriage established itself in all western nations, but, as Westermarck*

* "History of Human Marriage," pp. 459, 505.

has recently shown, contrary to current preconceptions, monogamy has all along been the predominant form. This fact alone might have suggested to them that, quite apart from the passions of individuals, there is something socially advantageous in the system which makes the parent responsible for the support of his own children. What this is, it is, of course, not difficult to discover. The society which, by the pressure of public opinion or of legislation, has encouraged the idea that a man shall not undertake the responsibilities of a family without some reasonable hope of being able to fulfil the obligations implied, has, at least, some guarantee that only those shall do so who possess the qualities required for co-operation in its common life, and has tended to reap the advantage that such a selective agency confers. And if this has been so in the past, is there any reason to expect that it is otherwise to-day? On the contrary, all the evidence that is to hand points to the still greater importance of maintaining, under modern conditions, the idea of parental responsibility. It seems certain that, owing to improvements in the material environment, many, who in former times would have succumbed to such forms of selective agency as are represented by bad sanitation and preventable disease, are now preserved and enabled to propagate their disabilities. A fact like this does not, of course, provide us with an excuse for the neglect of material improvements. It does, however, constitute an additional reason why those who have at heart the permanent improvement of the condition of the people should realize on what forces they have to depend in the future for the continued improvement of the race. One of the most important of these is, undoubtedly, the sense of social obligation on the part of the would-be parent. Surely, there is every *a priori* reason why the social reformer who is in earnest about his business should be anxious to strengthen this sense where it already exists, to create it where it is absent. And if this is so, what are we to say of proposals, such as those advocated by some prominent socialists, for the indiscriminate support of children (not to speak of adults), one of the first effects of which would be to weaken this guarantee? Only

one conclusion as to the scientific pretensions of these writers is possible. It is the one drawn by a recent critic of current socialism. "Nothing," he says, "is more certain than that if Socialism means the total suppression of the personal struggle for existence, as above described, and the collective guarantee of support to all children, and, still worse, to all adults, without enforcing the responsibilities of parents, or of sons and daughters . . . it really is in hopeless conflict with the universal postulate of the struggle for existence, and natural selection, as justly interpreted of human society."*

To the policy of standing staunchly by the modern family as one of the main conditions of social progress, there is, of course, an alternative. We may adopt the plan of guaranteeing support to all parents and children alike. But in this case we shall have to discover a means of guaranteeing also *the kind* of parent and *the kind* of child who shall be supported. How this could be done, we all know from Plato's "Republic." But how Plato's method would suit the views of writers who make a practice of denouncing the interference of the law with the delicate relations of wedded life† is another matter. It would be a curious instance of the irony of events if these writers had their way, and society abolished the family, only to find itself saddled with the responsibility of improving the breed by a system of state-authorized and state-authenticated unions. Love would have become "free," but only by having become a public nuisance, perhaps a crime. The legal marriage which we know would be no more; but where should we look for the "real marriage" that was to take its place?

III.

The interpretation put by revolutionary writers upon the facts above quoted is an impossible one. But apart from high-flying theories as to their import, there is sufficient in them

* "Aspects of the Social Problem," p. 306. See the whole essay, "Socialism and Natural Selection."

† Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p. 109. His views on the duty of the community to at least one of the parents are to be found on p. 54 and (by implication) pp. 160, 161.

to cause serious uneasiness to many people, and to justify a closer analysis of the tendencies actually at work. The rest of this paper contains a few suggestions by way of assisting such an analysis. I admit that there is danger ahead. The opinions I have just been criticising are in themselves I believe a real danger. But I shall make my position clearer if I state at once my belief that the danger has been greatly exaggerated, and that the changes that are proceeding in the structure of society, and are so deeply affecting the family, are capable of quite another interpretation. So far from being an evidence of decay in the institution itself, I believe they are preparing the way for its reconstruction on a higher plane of national and individual life. Before offering any proof of this contention, I shall try to put the question in proper focus by fixing your attention on the line of the changes through which the monogamic constitution we have inherited has passed in historical times. We shall then be in a better position to understand the continuity of the whole process, and the naturalness of the transformation it is at present undergoing.

Setting aside the fantastic theory that the family as we know it began in polyandry, went through the grand circle of individual ownership—first polygamic and then monogamic—to return in the twentieth century to a species of sublimated promiscuity, we may notice two phases through which we actually know it to have passed. First, we have what we may call the tribal family. I have already alluded to this phase. It is sometimes said that the modern monogamous family is the product of Christianity. This, of course, is pure perversity. If there were no other proof that the Christian idea of the family is derived from an earlier source, we should have such proof in the fact that Christian feeling has all along acquiesced in the greater leniency with which society treats unfaithfulness on the part of the husband. This is an obvious survival, coming to us from a time when the unity and continuity of the family were matters of vital importance, and when the birth into the family circle of a son belonging to another was one of the greatest misfortunes that could

befall it. Of this phase of the European family we fortunately know a good deal. It is the form familiar to us among the early Greeks and Romans. I have already alluded to its general functions. The housefather was here the temporary representative of a corporate society. On him devolved the duty, in the first place, of performing in his own person the family rites, and, secondly, of securing that, when he was gone, the hearth should not be left desolate for want of a legitimate heir. People often speak as though the hardship and constraint of the early household pressed only on the women and children. It is quite true that in theory the wife and the children were the property of the man. From our point of view this constitutes the blot on the system. But by the same theory the man was the property of the family. Under certain circumstances, the theory might press with equal irksomeness on him. This was the case when, for instance, a housefather died childless. Under these circumstances the nearest male relative was compelled to divorce his own wife and to marry the widow, in order to raise up seed unto his brother.

This is the first stage of the historical family. How firmly it was rooted in the Roman political system is indicated by the boast that for five hundred years there had been no case of the divorce of a Roman mother. But by the end of the republic and the beginning of the empire a great change had passed over public opinion. The old religious marriage had fallen into the background, and its place had been taken by a new form of civil union, which, while it gave a woman of the richer classes considerable control over her own property, gave to women, as a whole, a far less secure and dignified position. The wife had passed out of the protection of the tribe; she had not yet passed under the protection of the church. The strictness of the Christian view on the subject of divorce was the natural reaction from the extreme laxity that prevailed in the Pagan world. "For this cause," Christ had declared, "shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh." It is not surprising that Christianity, with its promise of a wholly new position

for the wife and mother in a regenerate society, should have appealed, as we know it did, with a peculiar force to the educated women of the Roman communities.

To us, as we look back, the teaching of Christ himself seems to contain the germ of a higher ideal of family life, which we might call the ethical as distinguished from the tribal. But the time had not yet come. The teaching of the Gospels is one thing, the teaching of the Church is another. Two influences in the latter were hostile to the new ideal,—the Pauline theology and the Roman Law. Paul distinctly teaches the subordination of women. "The husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church" At times he seems to extend only a cold toleration to the married state. "He that giveth [his daughter] in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better." On the other hand, the Church adopted from the Roman Law the whole theory of the civil position of women. "Women," said the Roman Law,* "are removed from all civil and public functions, and consequently cannot act on juries, nor hold offices of state, nor sue, nor intervene on behalf of another, nor be procurators." "The law," says Bodin, interpreting the Christian theory, "has forbidden to women all burdens and offices proper to man, such as judge, advocate, and similar affairs, not only from prudence, but as much because manly actions are contrary to the sex, to feminine shame, and modesty."† It is true that the Council of Trent declared marriage to be a sacrament, and that the Church has always regarded it as indissoluble; but in other respects it left the position of women where it found it as defined by the Roman Law. As Sir Henry Maine truly says, "The Christian ideal of the family is the Roman purified from license of divorce."

The Middle Ages created no essential change in the idea of the family and the position of women. It would not be true

* Ulpian, Dig. L. 17.2.

† Speaking of the old law of England, an American writer truly says that just as under Roman law the husband held his wife's life in his hand, so by the old law of England he might castigate her for certain offences. He adds, "to this right the men of the lower classes of the English people still fondly cling."

to say that new influences were not at work. The worship of the Virgin, the poetry of chivalry, and the dignity that attached to the baron's wife in the long absences of her lord and master could not have failed to suggest new ideals. But glimpses, such as Chaucer gives us in the tale of the patient Griselda, show how slow they were in bearing fruit, and there is every reason to believe that Sir Henry Maine is again right in maintaining that in its ultimate results "the disruption of the Roman Empire was very unfavorable to the personal and proprietary liberty of women."

We have here, then, the second type of the historical family in Europe. As contrasted with what I have called the tribal, we might call it the mystical or ecclesiastical. The woman's position is no longer one of ownership. Yet it is one of subjection, and the very fact that the man's position has meantime changed from one of responsibility to the tribal group to one of comparative freedom—"from status to contract"—makes it in some respects worse than before. This ideal has lasted down to our own time, and it is the changes it is at present undergoing that we have to interpret. What surprises one is not that it is being subjected to a systematic attack, but that the attack should have been so long delayed. One might have supposed that the rights of woman would have been included in the rights of man as understood at the end of last century, and that the constitution of the family would have undergone changes analogous to those effected in the constitution of civil government. We need not stop to note the causes to which the comparative neglect of the claims of women is due. It is sufficient to notice that in our own day and generation they have been put forward with sufficient power to make it impossible any longer to ignore them.

These claims come before us under three main heads corresponding generally to the great watchwords of the French Revolution. There is, first, the claim for liberty, personal and economical. Secondly, there is the claim for equality, equality of political rights and equality before the law. These two explain themselves, and need not detain us. We all know

what they are and to what extent they have hitherto been satisfied. But there is a third which calls for a word of explanation. I have said it is analogous to fraternity. It is the claim for what, in want of a better word, I may call ethical consideration. Men are asked to "consider" women not in the sense merely of considering their comfort,—every decent man, of course, does that,—but of considering their lives as beings with intellectual, social, and æsthetic interests like their own. They are asked to remember that unmarried women are their fellow-citizens as well as prospective wives; that wives are their fellow-laborers in the more public business of life, as well as their partners in the management of the household and the education of their children.

The question that presses upon many is whether the organism we call the "family" will be able to adapt itself to these new demands. We have already seen that there are some to whom the new position claimed for women, and the general trend of our whole civilization seem incompatible with its continued existence. The view for which I contend, on the contrary, is that while the new conditions undoubtedly suggest many new and serious problems, yet on the whole, so far from being hostile to it, they are only preparing the way for a purer and more beneficent form of family life. To prove this position in any detail would carry me beyond the limits of a single paper. One or two remarks on the effects of the new movement under each of the above heads must suffice.

1. The claim that is being put forward for the economic independence of women suggests serious problems. There is, for instance, the whole question of the employment of married women in the factory, the shop, and the school. That such employment is bound to act unfavorably on the health, cleanliness, and moral influence of the home needs no proof. But we are all awaking to the danger. The best workmen are said themselves to be opposed to the employment of married women in factories, not out of any selfish desire to limit competition, but out of an intelligent appreciation of the loss involved to the household, and through it to the community as a whole. Government is not unlikely to

take up the subject. In so far as it does so, legislation may be socialistic, but it is a socialism that tends to restore and not to destroy the family.*

With regard to the higher education and the new economic opportunities of the middle-class girl, I have not the slightest doubt they act on the whole favorably upon the family life. One of the chief sources of ill-assorted and unhappy unions in the past has been the necessity girls have been under of providing for themselves by marriage. The want, moreover, of more serious interest has left them a prey to the sentimental novel and other social influences that have tended to drive them into marriage at the earliest opportunity. The new chances which are now opening up offer them in the life of the school-mistress or the government clerk an attractive alternative. That it has proved so is shown by the statistics above quoted relative to the number of this class who actually marry. These statistics are not to be explained by any aversion on the part of these women to marriage as marriage. It is the *kind* of marriage that they see in too many cases around them that disheartens them. For themselves, they are quite properly determined, as has been said, in a matter so important, to have nothing but the genuine article. They look in marriage not only for the old-fashioned "union of hearts," but for the union of heart and head in some serious interest which will survive the mere attractions of sex and form a solid bond of union even in the absence of others which, like the birth of children, depend on fortune. In all this men have nothing to complain of. If they fail to rise to the occasion, it is their loss. But who that is "a good hopper" can entertain any fear upon this head or help regarding the reaction that the new

* The same is true of legislation undertaken in the interest of the children. It is not the protection of the child from parent or employer that endangers the family, but the unrestricted employment of children. It is true that the child has been withdrawn from the factory to be sent to the school. But for every hour it spends in the school it used to spend two or three in the factory, and while the influences to which it was there subjected were in their nature hostile to the recognition of family claims, the moral training of the school-room may be directed to reinforce the family virtues of purity, gratitude, and obedience.

movement is already beginning to have upon men as one of its most hopeful signs?

Before leaving the economic side of the problem, there remains to be mentioned the argument one sometimes hears that the transference to machinery of most of the tasks, from the spinning of cloth to the making of candles, which made the wives of our grandfathers so indispensable a part of creation, has acted hostilely upon the family. Here, again, it may be shown that on the contrary this was an essential condition of the possibility of a higher ideal of family life. Machinery is to the life of a people what habits are to the individual. As it is the essential condition of individual progress that acquired dexterities should be handed over to the unconscious mechanism of the lower centres of the nervous system, so it is the condition of the progress of a nation that the hands and minds of the men and women who compose it should be set free to provide for the higher needs that are always emerging as the lower come to be more easily satisfied. To think that women who have not to scrub and bake, to spin and brew, will find nothing for their hands and minds to do that is worth doing, and when done well is of essential value to family, and through it to national happiness, shows a poor ideal of the equipments that are needful for a truly human life.

2. There is still less doubt that the steps that have been hitherto taken, or are likely to be taken in the immediate future, to meet the claim of women to legal and political equality, make on the whole for the improvement and not for the destruction of the family. The enfranchisement of unmarried women by assigning to them rights of citizenship independently of their function as child-bearers acts in the same direction as improved economic opportunities. It renders them less dependent for social consideration upon the accident of marriage. The case of married women is thought by some to be different. It may be so. But if it is, the proposal to differentiate cannot be supported on the ground of the danger to family tranquillity. Where husband and wife are in political agreement no such danger can exist; where the wife feels strongly on the opposite side from her husband, to assign her

a vote would at any rate remove the rankle of injustice. On the head of the improved *legal* position of women it would probably be difficult to find any educated person who is prepared to regard the married women's property act and the recent decisions which give a liberal interpretation to what is technically known as cruelty as a ground of separation or divorce in any other light than as tardy measures of justice, which, so far from endangering, tend to sweeten and purify family life.

3. There is, finally, what I have called the ethical claim. It is this, probably, which causes most uneasiness in the minds of conservative people. "What," it is asked, "is to become of the family, if the abler class of women either refuse to marry altogether, or, when they have married, show a rooted objection to undertake the responsibility of children; or, again, after children have been born to them allow their attention to be diverted from their nurture and education by intellectual or artistic interest, public duties, or the pursuit of an industrial calling? Above all, what is to become of the unity of the family under a dual control of equals, neither of whom owes subordination to the other?"

Some of these points have been already considered, as, for instance, the alleged disinclination of educated women to enter marriage. With reference to the supposed objection to undertake the responsibility of children, it is highly doubtful how far this really exists. The maternal instinct is, happily, not confined to the uneducated. What is certain is that there is a well-grounded objection among all women to have the best years of their life consumed, and, perhaps, their whole health undermined, by the necessity of giving birth to and bringing up an unlimited number of children. Nor is this always or by any means exclusively the result, as some* would lead us to suppose, of an unsocial desire on the part of the wife to escape personal pain and trouble. It is just as often the result of a higher sense of the duty she owes to the children already born to her; and who can deny that both the family and the community at large may be very much the gainers by the restric-

* Among them apparently Mr. Benjamin Kidd.

Is the Family Declining?

tion of the children to such a number as can be carefully nurtured and educated?

That there is a real danger to the family in the more showy life of art, literature, or the public platform may readily be admitted. The danger, however, is not to be met by making it harder for women to enter these fields, but by permitting them to discover for themselves the real value of the results the average woman may hope to achieve in them as compared with the narrower one of the family. It is quite true that the public lecturer, the artist, and the journalist or writer, reach a wider audience (when they reach any at all, which is not always), but when you consider the *power* of the influence which the mother of a family exercises over her children, and the comparative certainty of producing the precise effect she aims at and not (as is so often the case with the politician and writer) something quite different, the balance seems more than redressed.

The question of the division of power exercises many good people. "To avoid contentions," it is urged, "must there not be one head? Must not one decide?" The answer surely is simple. Where there is an uncompromisable difference, one must certainly decide if there is to be any decision at all. But why need it always be the same one? It is certain that in some matters the husband ought to decide. It is equally certain that in others the decision ought to be with the wife. What these matters respectively are must depend upon the different education and experience of each. But surely it would be strange if, while in every other department of life we are learning more and more to rely on the opinion of the expert, in the most important of all our businesses, the management of our households, we should still insist on acting on the discredited theory of the omniscience of the official head.

IV.

I have tried to show that the circumstances alleged in proof of the view that the family is on the decline, when rightly interpreted indicate, on the contrary, that a basis is being prepared for a structure that will give more room for the free

play of all that is best in human nature. I have hitherto said nothing of the general form this new structure is likely to take, or the changes in law that are desirable to give it stability. I am not sure that much can profitably be said, but shall venture on one or two remarks.

In the first place, it may be taken for granted that the form will be monogamic. The causes which have favored polygamy in the past—viz., war, the early decay of female beauty, the desire for large families of children or industrial establishments of wives, general disregard of the feelings of women themselves are gradually disappearing. The decrease of war has equalized the proportions of the sexes. The modern woman depends less on physical charms for the power she exercises over man. The body grows old;

“But the soul whence love comes—all ravage leaves that whole;
Vainly the flesh fades; soul makes all things new.”

A wife's labor is no longer so necessary, and there is a growing consideration for the feelings of women.* Finally, we have the authority of Professor Bain for the view that monogamy is the form that has the best psychological support.

All this is admitted even by the advocates of the most advanced views upon marriage.†

The question is not of the general form of marriage, but of the legal arrangements and social habits that are most favorable to its development as a purely ethical institution.

The decision of this question must depend of course on the special circumstances of individual communities. In view of prospective changes in the English law, I should like merely to refer to a distinction which is often overlooked, but which, perhaps, goes to the root of the matter. In proposed alterations of the existing law, we ought to draw a broad line between a law which has for its purpose merely the recognition of the fact that a family has already been hopelessly destroyed as a moral organism, and a law which may have the effect of

* On the whole subject, see Westermarck, *op. cit.*, p. 505, following.

† See Carpenter, *op. cit.*, chapter on “Marriage.”

itself aiding in the destruction. To the former class, as we probably should all be agreed, belong laws recognizing unfaithfulness as a ground of divorce. Improved moral feeling will probably demand an extension of this principle. The present inequality of husband and wife before the law ought undoubtedly to be abolished. It is a survival from the tribal ideal of family justice, and ought to have no place in the ethical. There is also much to be said from this point of view in favor of recognizing desertion after a sufficiently long period as a ground of divorce.* On the other hand, laws which permit divorce on the ground of mutual consent or of incompatibility of temper belong to a wholly different category. The very fact that these circumstances will be taken as valid reasons for a divorce tends to disincline the parties to make any sustained endeavor to overcome the initial friction, which, I venture to think, every marriage, however "happy," necessarily entails, and which it sometimes may require a serious, though by no means an unwholesome effort to allay.

These, however, are all details, and may be left to the sifting criticism of time and experience. The chief thing for us to do is to clear our minds of cant, and to remember that there is a cant of the new naturalistic school as well as of the old mystical. It is cant to say, "what God has joined let no man put asunder," and to appeal to "a divine institution" against social expediency. It is no less cant to say that "Love is Free," and to appeal from the legal to the "natural marriage." I am not sure that the latter kind is not the more pernicious cant of the two. As a reaction against the ecclesiastical theory of the indissolubility of marriage, the free love movement has a certain justification. It is, at any rate, perfectly comprehensible. Its error lies in abstracting from the power of the will in disciplining and controlling the affections. In this respect it is the opposite of the older French view of the marriage of suitability, the so-called *mariage de convenance*,

* This has long been so in Scotland, in most of the United States of America, (the period varying from one to five years), in Prussia, Austria and Hungary, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland.

which takes the will to be all and leaves the growth of affection to time and habit. Extremes meet, and the error of both these views is seen in the tendency of public opinion in France to sanction both forms of marriage and to permit them to exist side by side as naturally complementary.

To sum up, I have tried to show that the new circumstances, while they undoubtedly portend change, are not a sign of decline in the family. Decline is defined by the physiologists as "the diminution of the formative activity of an organism." It has yet to be proved that the family is incapable of transforming itself to suit the new environment. The evidence is in reality all the other way. It goes to prove that its energies are unimpaired, that the required transformation is in the very act of taking place, and that, when it is accomplished, we shall have a form of family life at once more coherent, and more stable than any we have yet seen.

The real danger to the family is not to be looked for in any of the things that are alleged, but in the moral paralysis that comes of the idea that the difficulties in the way of its maintenance and reconstruction are insuperable. The cure for this is for each man to realize for himself, in the first place, how much society depends for the strength of its tissue on the health and strength of the cells that compose it, and especially of that primeval cell we call the family; and, secondly, how much each can contribute to this health by the intelligent appreciation of what the new circumstances demand of him as a partner in the life of such a group.

Yet here, too, there is a danger of cant. After all, the family was made for man not man for the family. It is only one of the forms, though a very fundamental one, in which man expresses his spiritual life. In this respect, it is to him what the material is to the artist,—a medium wherein he embodies his ideal of what life should be. If it should ever cease to be a fit medium for that purpose, the time will have come for its destruction. I have argued that there is, as yet, no appearance of such a time. Alteration and adaptation, it will, of course, require from time to time. In seeking to effect this alteration, the chief precaution is to make sure that we

do so in the interest of a higher and not of a lower ideal,—that it is the human will, in its effort after fuller self-expression and not mere individual caprice, that finds itself hampered by its present form.

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THE MORAL AND ETHICAL TEACHINGS OF THE ANCIENT ZOROASTRIAN RELIGION.

THE moral and ethical code which a people sets up for itself, and the way in which it lives up to this, may be taken as a sort of thermometric register by which the social, physical, and spiritual condition of the nation can be judged. The history of the ancient race of Iran affords a fair illustration of this truth; and the moral status of Persia throughout its earlier history, including the mighty empire of the Achæmenian kings and the sovereign sway of the Sasanian rulers in early Christian times, will briefly here be sketched. It is the lessons of the past that teach the wisdom of the present and the future.

In order better to understand the moral and ethical code of Zoroastrianism, however, a few words regarding the nature of the religion itself may be given by way of introduction. The devoted believers in this early faith, worshippers of light as they are sometimes termed, paid pious devotion to the great god Ormazd, or Ahura Mazda, as he was called, and by creed they were the faithful followers of Zoroaster. This was the Prophet of Ancient Iran, whose clarion voice of reform rang out over the land six centuries or more before the birth of the Christ, or many years previous to the time when the Jews were carried up into captivity at Jerusalem, or the gentle Buddha preached to thirsting souls of India the doctrine of salvation from misery through renunciation. A characteristic tenet of the old Zoroastrian creed was Dualism. This dogma recognized the existence of two primeval spirits, Ormazd and Ahriman, the Good and the Evil, whose influence pervades the world. The incessant warfare and constant struggle of